

***Congressman says key concerns are drug abuse, public health, roads***

*By Kevin Carbury, Suburban Journals*

The public should be able to get in touch with their government leaders, who, in turn, should be responsive to their constituents' needs, according to U.S. Rep. Russ Carnahan.

Carnahan, D-St. Louis, made this the central theme of his fourth State of the District Address Thursday afternoon at Arnold City Hall.

Tracing the country's split from Great Britain due to the detachment of the king from his subjects in America, Carnahan said elected officials are in their positions to listen to their constituents and act on their requests.

"In order to do my job, I must be accessible to you," he told a crowd of elected officials, citizens and media members from Jefferson and Ste. Genevieve counties. He was to conduct a similar meeting for St. Louis City and county residents later that day in Affton.

"I consider this part of my job," he said.

Carnahan also pointed out that he has formed advisory committees in the district to garner public opinion on health care, senior citizens and veterans issues.

The Congressman went on to enumerate various topics that have been matters of discussion in Washington during the past year. The war in Iraq, reducing the nation's dependency on foreign oil and stimulating the economy are some of the major issues that Congress has been tackling, he said.

Carnahan said he is pushing the administration on a new direction in the war in Iraq, saying that it is time for the people of Iraq to take over the fight and noting that more than 3,000 American service members have lost their lives in the conflict.

"Solutions now depend on returning our troops home," he told those assembled.

The war in Iraq has hurt America's image worldwide, Carnahan said, dropping the country's popularity to its lowest point in 50 years, based on international polls.

As to the 3rd Congressional District, Carnahan said he is concerned about methamphetamine, dangerous roads, the high rate of childhood obesity, natural disaster preparedness and smoking.

Noting that the federal highway bill is due for reauthorization in 2009, Carnahan said he's working to get more funding for improvements to routes 21, M and MM.

"We need to look at ways to improve both north-south and east-west access in Jefferson County," he said.

Carnahan would also like to see the Metro-Link light rail system expanded to northern Jefferson County because of growth in the Arnold-Imperial and Fenton areas.

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